The Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey

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The findings in this report are based on data collected in the seventh Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey (NASIS). This survey is part of an on-going study of the quality of life in Nebraska conducted by the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

In 1983, a representative sample of 1834 Nebraskans eighteen years of age or older living in households was interviewed by telephone. The respondents to the 1983 survey are the fourth wave of a panel originally selected and interviewed in 1977, re-interviewed in 1979, and 1981, and supplemented by the 1982 cross-sectional survey respondents who were new migrants to the state or who had become adults (18) after 1980. These respondents will be reinterviewed every two years in order to provide information on changing quality of life. The interviews averaged approximately 45 minutes and included questions about health, political interests, energy conservation, occupation, recreation, education, family life and other matters reflecting the quality of life experienced in the state. For the entire sample, 95 out of 100 times the percentages computed from the items asked on the survey are likely to be accurate within plus or minus 2.25 percent of the figure that would have been obtained if each adult in Nebraska had been surveyed. This is an estimate of maximum error and for most items the percentages are likely to be even more accurate.

The data gathered by NASIS are used by a wide variety of State and local government agencies for policy and program plan- ning and by faculty and students at the University of Nebraska and other colleges for research. No information identifying any respondent is released to any users and the strict confidenti- ality of individual respondents is rigidly enforced. While the final responsibility for the organization and structure of the survey and for reports produced under its name rests with the Bureau of Sociological Research, public agencies and University departments play an integral part in planning the survey through an Advisory Committee. Public organizations interested in mem- bership on the Advisory Committee should contact the NASIS Study Director.

Funding for NASIS comes from the University of Nebraska, the Bureau of Sociological Research, and State and local agencies which buy items and data analysis from the survey.

The NASIS surveys are repeated each year to measure changes in the quality of life in Nebraska. While there is a core of questions which is included every year, each survey has a large component of unique items which address specific topical issues. Plans for future years include interviewing a new sample of Nebraskans in 1984 as well as continuing to reinterview the 1977 panel every two years to assess changes in their lives. Additional detail on the NASIS surveys regarding use of the survey data or cost of purchasing items on future surveys can be ob- tained by contacting David R. Johnson, NASIS Study Director, at the Bureau of Sociological Research or by sending for a copy of the 1984 NASIS Prospectus.

EFFECTS OF THE RECESSION ON NEBRASKANS

The recession from which we now seem to be recovering affects the economy in many ways. Sales decrease, production declines and unemployment goes up. Economists closely follow these and other indicators, but they tell us little about the impact of the recession on individual families. Information from a representative sample of 1834 Nebraskans interviewed in the winter of 1983 as part of the Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey give us information on families that were adversely affected. Not only were they asked about the impact of the recession, but the ways in which they coped with recession problems and the effect it had on their families.

Problems Caused by Economic Hard Times

First, a significant number of people were worried about the effects of the recession. People were asked: "How much have you worried that one of the major wage earners in your household would lose his or her job? Do you worry very much, somewhat, hardly at all, or not at all?" Seven percent worried "very much" and another 23 percent worried "somewhat". Thus, nearly a third of the population was worried that the recession might severely affect their family income.

The actual economic effects varied widely as response to the following question indicates: "During the past year, Nebraska has faced a number of economic problems. Many peoples' jobs have been affected. Have you or any member of your household experienced any of the following problems as a result of economic hard times

within the last year?" The list of problems and the percent of households affected are shown in Table 1.

Families had to forego scheduled pay increases more than anything else. But cuts in overtime, hours or days worked and lay offs were also common. Forced retirement, cuts in pension benefits and public assistance, and running out of unemployment benefits occurred in a small but significant number of cases. In all, one-third of the families interviewed were directly affected by the recession. When those who worried about job loss are added in, forty-four percent were affected.

Who Was Affected by the Recession?

Did the recession hit some Nebraskans harder than others, or did it affect nearly all segments of the community? We examined income, occupation, age, marital status, and community size to learn whether some people were more likely to experience a recession-related problem than others. The figures are shown in Table 2.

All but the very lowest and the very highest income levels reported a recession-related problem. Those with family incomes of under $5,000 (mostly elderly individuals on social security) and $50,000 and over were least likely to be adversely affected. All those with family incomes between these extremes (nearly 90 percent of the population) were at the same risk of being hit by the recession. Farmers and farm laborers were less likely to report a recession-related problem than those in any other occupations. Professionals, managers, and sales persons were less likely to report problems than clerical workers, service workers

and blue collar workers. The very young (under 30) were more likely to be affected than those in other age categories, and those over 60 were least likely to report a recession-related problem. Divorced and separated individuals along with those who never married were more vulnerable to the recession than married persons, and widowed individuals (mostly retired persons) were least likely to be affected by the recession. Those living in cities (more than 10,000 population) were slightly more likely to be adversely affected by the recession than those in smaller communities. In short, the recession cut a wide swath in hitting people from all walks of life.

Coping With the Recession

To learn about the ways families cope with recession respondents were asked: "As a result of this loss, have you or other household members had to borrow money, take another job, move in with someone else, provide child care or anything else to adjust to this loss?" As the figures in Table 3 indicate, the most common methods of coping were to borrow money and take another job. In the "other" category, the most frequent strategy was to cut expenses. Some were able to work more hours. Other tactics included postponing bill payment, selling the house, second car or other assets, dipping into savings, selling blood, applying for public assistance, and "eating at mom's". The greater the number of recession-related problems the more likely they would have to borrow money and use other coping strategies as the data in Table 3 show.

A significant number of people, while perhaps not suffering from the recession themselves, had relatives who were. Thirty-eight percent reported relatives not in the household who suffered job lay offs and other recession-related problems. Many of the respondents reported helping these kin. The types of help given are shown in Table 4. Loans and gifts of food and other necessities were the most common forms of help. But they also let the afflicted persons live in their home, helped with baby sitting and found jobs for them. Giving moral support and encouragement was the most common form of assistance. Paying bills, loaning the car, and helping with repairs are other forms of aid reported. Forty-four percent of those who had relatives affected by the recession gave some kind of help to get them through.

Impact on the Family

Economic problems invariably influence other aspects of life. Of particular interest is the effect recession-related problems has on family relations. To tap this dimension, respondents were asked: "What do you think has been the affect of this loss in your family relationships? Has it brought you closer together, made it harder for you to get along with each other, or no change?" The response to this question is shown in Table 5. Overall, recession caused economic problems only altered family relations in about a third of the cases. Where it did bring about a change, approximately half reported it brought the family closer together and the other half said it made it harder for family members to get along.

As the number of recession related problems increased so did the number of respondents reporting that the quality of family relations was affected. When the recession created more than two types of economic problems, the number of families affected jumped to 56 percent. Again, the tendency is for the proportion of families reporting positive and negative effects on family relations to be about the same. We interpret this to mean that in families that are already having problems, economic problems made them worse. But in families that are cohesive, economic adversity strengthens the bonds.

Conclusions

One-third of Nebraska households were adversely affected by the recent recession. The number of households experiencing major setbacks such as job lay off or cutbacks in work hours is nearly equal to the total number of households in the Capital City. Nearly all income levels were affected. Clerical, service, and blue collar workers, those under 30, divorced, separated and never married individuals and those living in cities were more vulnerable to the effects of the recession than those in other categories. To cope with these losses people borrowed money, cut back on expenses and took other jobs.

Many families were indirectly affected by the recession because close relatives suffered a loss. Aid was often given to these families in the form of loans, gifts, and encouragement.

Family relations in households suffering a recession related loss were often affected. But such adversity seemed to bring families closer together as much as it did to drive them apart.

TABLE 1.

PERCENT AND NUMBER OF NEBRASKA HOUSEHOLDS AFFECTED BY RECESSION

	Percent of Households Affected	Number of Households Affected Based on 1980 Census*
Job Lay Off	11	62,988
Cut in Hours or Days Worked	12	68,714
Cut in Overtime	11	62,988
Cut in Job Benefits	7	40,083
Loss of Vacation Time	4	22,905
Forced to Take Lower Paying Job	5	28,631
Had to Forego Scheduled Pay Raise	14	80,166
Cut in Public Assistance (e.g., food stamps, child care or social security benefits)	2	11,452
Unemployment Benefits Ran Out	2	11,452
Cut in Pension or Retirement Benefits	2	11,452
Forced to Take Early Retirement	1	5,727
Any of the Above	33	188,962

*Number derived by multiplying the number of households in Nebraska (1980 Census estimates 572,615) by the percent of survey respondents reporting each problem.

TABLE 2.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE HURT BY RECESSION.

Income	Percent Reporting Loss
Under $5,000	27
$5,000-$9,999	33
$10,000-$14,999	37
$15,000-$19,999	33
$20,000-$24,999	37
$25,000-$29,999	38
$30,000-$39,999	35
$40,000-$49,999	31
$50,000-$59,999	20
$60,000 or More	14

Occupation	
Professional-Managerial	27
Clerical	44
Sales	31
Blue Collar - Skilled	47
Blue Collar - Unskilled	52
Service Workers	43
Farmers and Farm Laborers	8

Age	Percent Reporting Loss
18 - 30	48
31 - 45	34
46 - 59	35
60 +	13

Marital Status	
Married	34
Widowed	14
Divorced/Separated	48
Never Married	40

Community Size	
Farm - Open Country	25
Up to 10,000	33
10,000 and Up	37
Lincoln - Omaha	38

TABLE 3.

METHODS OF ADJUSTING TO THE ECONOMIC LOSS CAUSED BY THE RECESSION

	Percent Households Who Reported Using Method	Percent Using Method Who Reported One or Two Problems	Percent Using Method Who Reported More Than 2 Problems
Borrow Money	19	13	35
Take Another Job	19	11	38
Move in With Someone Else	3	1	8
Help Out with Baby Sitting	2	2	4
Other	15	12	22

TABLE 4.

TYPES OF HELP GIVEN TO RELATIVES HURT BY RECESSION.

	Percent Who Helped
Loaned Money	22
Provided Housing	8
Gifts of Food and Other Necessities	27
Given Them Work	9
Provide Help on Babysitting	10
Other	9
Any Help	44

TABLE 5.

IMPACT OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIP ON FAMILY RELATIONS.

	Problems Brought Family Closer Together	Problems Made It Harder for Family Members to Get Along	No Change
Overall	18	16	66
1 - 2 Recession-Related Problems	18	15	67
More than 2 Problems	31	25	44

List of reports already released using data gathered in the 1982 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey. These may be purchased at the indicated price from the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Report Number	Title
1.	Designs, Procedures, Instruments and Forms for the 1983 NASIS. Helen A. Moore. Price: $7.50